DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 672 EA 031 829

AUTHOR	Bulach, Cletus R.; Williams, Ronnie
TITLE	The Impact of Setting and Size on a School's Culture and Climate.
PUB DATE	2002-03-01
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association (25th, Sarasota, FL, February 27-March 2, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Culture Conflict; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Group Behavior; *Group Dynamics; *Institutional Characteristics; *School Size

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the impact of school setting and size on the culture and climate of a school. Twenty-five schools and 1,163 teachers were involved in the study. There was a significant negative correlation between school size and the school's culture and climate. Other findings were that elementary schools had more positive climates than middle and high schools, and urban schools had less positive climates than rural and suburban. (Contains 14 references and six tables of ANOVA and descriptive statistics. An appendix lists definitions of variables that measure school culture and school climate.) (Author/WFA)

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ED 467 672

Setting and Size

THE IMPACT OF SETTING AND SIZE ON A SCHOOL'S CULTURE AND CLIMATE

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Presentation at the Eastern Educational Research Association at Sarasota, FL on March 1, 2002.

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THE IMPACT OF SETTING AND SIZE ON A SCHOOL'S CULTURE AND CLIMATE*

A B S T R A C T

This research investigated the impact of school setting and size on the culture and climate of a school. Twenty-five schools and 1163 teachers were involved in the study. There was a significant negative correlation between school size and the school's culture and climate. Other findings were that elementary schools had more positive climates than middle and high schools and urban schools had less positive climates than rural and suburban.

Introduction

The issue of class size has been studied extensively (Biddle and Berliner (2002), but the issue of school size has received much less attention. A review of doctoral dissertations found only two studies dealing with school size during the past seven years (Tucker, 1997; McKee, 1996). However, interest in school size could be increasing, as a result of the February issue of *Educational Leadership* which was devoted to school and class size. Eight articles are devoted to school size and five are devoted to class size. It is also interesting to observe that while there is research to document the benefits of class size, there is little research to show the benefits of school size. All the articles mentioned in the aforementioned journal are based on opinion. McKee, at the conclusion of his dissertation stated that there was no main effect between school size and student achievement. At the conclusion of his dissertation, Tucker stated that schools are not significantly different over a range of indicators as a result of size. One area where school size could possibly have an impact is a school's culture or climate. However, in both dissertations and in all of the articles there was no mention made of school culture or climate.

The importance of school climate and to some extent culture for an effective school has been the subject of extensive research. Bulach, Malone, & Castleman (1994), in their research on 20 schools found a significant difference in student achievement between schools with a good school climate and those with a poor school climate. They also cited 17 references in their review of literature in support of this relationship. The relationship between school climate and achievement continues to be researched. Hirase (2000) and Erpelding (1999), found that schools with a positive climate had higher academic achievement.

While there is a plethora of research showing the importance of school climate for achievement, there is also some research that supports its importance for other factors. For example, Bulach and Malone (1995) in their work with 20 schools, investigated the relationship between school climate and how effectively two reforms (school-based decision making and/or the non-graded primary)were being implemented in Kentucky schools. They found significant positive relationships (+.50 and +.40, $p < .001$) between school climate and how effectively faculty perceived the reforms to be implemented.

***Parts of this paper are taken from Bulach (2001) and Bulach and Berry (2001)**

Other research links school climate to job satisfaction, levels of work-efficacy, and teacher autonomy. Bahamonde-Gunnell (2000) found that teachers who were satisfied with their jobs had more positive views about school climate than those who were not satisfied. Hirase's (2000) research found that teachers have a greater sense of work-efficacy in schools where there is a good climate. Erpelding (1999) found a strong relationship between teacher autonomy and school climate. Research that did not find a link was completed by Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon (1995). They investigated the impact of leadership style on school climate and found no significant difference in climate as a result of leadership styles.

Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) and Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) are two of the leading authors of leadership training textbooks for educational administrators. They both devote a chapter to school climate and its importance for the effective operation of a school. In summary, there is a great deal of support for school climate as an important factor that can directly and indirectly affect student achievement.

However, there was very little research devoted to factors that might impact school climate and culture. Given the importance of school climate, why has it not been mentioned in relation to school size? Is it a factor? Do small schools have a better climate than large schools? Another factor that could affect school culture and climate is the school setting. A school might have a positive climate in one setting, but not in another.

Purpose of this research

The purpose of this research was to compare the impact of school size and setting on a school's culture and climate. Size was defined as the number of teachers and students in a building. Setting was defined as rural, suburban, and inner-city schools, elementary, middle, and high schools. Four culture variables and seven climate variables were compared in these various settings. The four culture variables are group openness, group trust, group cooperation, and group atmosphere. The seven climate variables are discipline, instructional leadership, classroom instruction, expectations, parent/community involvement, sense of mission, and time on task/assessment.

Theoretical perspective

The size of a school definitely affects interpersonal interaction. In smaller schools there is a greater likelihood that faculty will know each other and the students. Opportunities to talk to each other, to know each other's names, to know each other's interests, etc. are more likely to occur. This could affect levels of openness, trust, cooperation, and atmosphere which are four culture variables that underlie the seven climate variables described above.

The setting of rural, suburban, and inner-city schools is quite different. Rural schools tend to be associated with a town or city and are often smaller in size. They also tend to have a more homogeneous student body. Suburban schools tend to have a more heterogeneous student body and tend to be larger in size. They also tend to be scattered in suburbs and are not part of a town or city. Inner-city schools tend to have students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and also tend to have a more homogeneous background. It is believed that these factors will combine to affect a school's culture and climate.

If settings such as **urban, suburban, and rural or elementary, middle, and high school or school size** influence how teachers perceive the culture and climate of the school, this would provide school administrators with additional insight in developing school improvement plans. For example, if school size has an impact on a school's culture and climate, this could influence building construction. If setting affects a school's culture and climate, school officials would be more alert to potential problems.

Definitions

culture/climate: those psychological attributes (culture) and institutional attributes (climate) that give an organization its personality (Bulach, Lunenburg, and McCallon, 1995). An analogy of an iceberg can be used to further explain climate and culture. The part of the iceberg that can be seen above the water could not exist without the part the that cannot be seen below the water. The climate variables can be seen whereas the culture variables cannot be seen and like the iceberg, climate cannot exist without the underlying value and belief systems that form the culture (see instrumentation for the culture and climate variables). Petersen and Deal (1998) define culture as the set of values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built over time. While this is the more commonly accepted definition of culture, we prefer ours because it distinguishes between two concepts that are closely intertwined: culture and climate.

Methodology

This causal-comparative study involved six high schools, seven middle schools, and twelve elementary schools. The largest school was a high school with 2191 students and smallest school was an elementary school with 290 students. Data were gathered from 1163 teachers regarding their perceptions of each school's culture/climate. School officials at these schools volunteered to take part in this study as part of their involvement in a grant to implement a character education curriculum (Bulach, 2001). The data were collected at a faculty meeting. The administration convened the meeting and explained that their responses were confidential. They were told to complete the survey and turn the data over to one of the teachers who would place it in an envelop, seal it, and turn it in to central office personnel. The data were then sent to the authors for analysis.

Instrumentation

The instrument that measures culture/climate is called the "Instructional Improvement Survey." It consists of four items that measure the demographic factors and 96 behaviors that measure a school's culture and climate. The culture variables (psychological attributes) are as follows: group openness, group trust, group cooperation, and group atmosphere. The climate. variables (institutional attributes) are also the effective school variables as follows: discipline, instructional leadership, classroom instruction, expectations, parent/community involvement, assessment/time on task, and sense of mission. The instrument has an overall reliability of + .95 as measured by the Cronbach alpha. Reliability on each of the subscales varies from +.79 to +.85 (Bulach, 2001). Teachers respond to each of the 96 behaviors on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree." Completely disagree was scored as a "one" and completely agree was scored as a "five." An agree response was scored as a 4.0. Since nine of the factors are measured by eight behaviors, a score of 32 (4 x 8 = 32) is considered a strength and scores below 32 are considered areas needing improvement. Group trust and group openness have more than eight behaviors and have been mathematically controlled to equal a score of 32 (see Appendix A for a listing of the behaviors for each culture/climate factor).

Procedures

The survey was administered to the faculties of 25 schools in the spring of 2001. Ten of the schools were rural with one high school, two middle schools, and seven elementary schools. Twelve of the schools were suburban schools with four high schools, four middle schools, and four elementary schools. Three of the schools were inner-city with one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school. A limitation of the study is the unequal number of schools from the different settings.

Method of Analysis

Analysis of variance and descriptive statistics were used to analyze differences between the settings. Post hoc comparisons were made with Tukey's HSD test. Pearson correlation was used to see if there is a relationship between culture/climate and size.

Results

A comparison of the culture/climate data for elementary, middle, and high schools indicated that elementary schools with an average score of 31.43 tended to have a better culture/climate than middle and high schools with average scores of 28.52 and 28.66 respectively (see Table 1). The ANOVA yielded an F-score of 6.96 ($p < .003$). The post hoc comparison of means using Tukey's test showed that elementary schools are more positive than middle and high schools ($p < .01$). There were no significant differences between middle and high schools ($p > .05$)

Table 1
A comparison of culture and climate means for elementary, middle, and high schools.

Setting	Mean	SD	df	F-score	P
Elementary schools	31.43	2.40	2	6.96	.003**
Middle schools	28.52	2.24	2		
High schools	28.66	1.92	2		

**p < .00 Elementary N =321, Middle N =343, High N=450

A further comparison using descriptive statistics, revealed that elementary schools had more positive scores on all 11 variables (see Table 2). Further, elementary scores approached or exceeded 32.0 (areas of strength) on eight of the 11 variables. A score of 32.0 is an "agree" response that the 96 behaviors measured by the survey are practiced by the faculty and administration. The middle and high schools, on the other hand, had no scores approaching 32.0. Based on the data, it was concluded that elementary schools have a better culture/climate than middle and high schools.

Table 2
A comparison of climate/culture averages by school type.

Instruction Related variables	Elementary schools	Middle schools	High schools
Group trust	31.68	29.56	29.54
Group openness	25.03	23.66	23.74
Group cooperation	30.10	27.78	28.34
Group atmosphere	30.62	26.43	26.94
Sense of mission	32.01	29.38	29.44
Parent involvement	33.61	31.13	30.30
Teaching	32.27	26.00	29.46
Discipline	31.49	27.91	28.56
Assessment/Time on Task	33.12	29.93	30.17
Leadership	31.97	27.53	28.71
Expectation	33.67	30.65	30.22
Average	31.43	28.52	28.66

Elementary N =321, Middle N =343, High N=450

ANOVA procedures comparing the means of urban, rural, and suburban schools (see Table 3) yielded an F-score of 15.02 ($p < .000$). The post hoc comparison of means using Tukey's test showed that urban schools were less positive than rural and suburban schools ($p < .000$). There were no significant differences between rural and suburban schools ($p > .05$)

Table 3
A comparison of culture and climate means for urban, rural, and suburban schools.

Setting	Mean	SD	df	F-score	P
Urban schools	26.65	1.80	2	15.02	.000***
Rural schools	29.75	2.24	2		
Suburban schools	30.00	2.19	2		

***$p < .000$, Urban N =96, Suburban N =775, Rural N=243

A further comparison of the culture/climate data for urban, suburban, and rural schools indicated that rural schools with an average score of 30.00 tended to have a slightly better culture/climate than suburban schools with an average score of 29.8 (see Table 4). Urban schools had an average score of 25.7 indicating that "sometimes those behaviors are practiced. Based on the closeness of the scores, it could be concluded that while there are some differences on individual variables for rural and suburban schools, the difference overall is very slight. Further the urban schools in this study were less positive on all dimensions of the culture/climate scale.

Table 4
A comparison of climate/culture averages by type setting.

Instruction Related variables	Urban schools	Suburban schools	Rural schools
Group trust	26.30	30.60	30.20
Group openness	22.60	24.10	24.60
Group cooperation	25.00	29.40	28.20
Group atmosphere .	23.00	27.80	29.10
Sense of mission	26.40	30.40	31.20
Parent involvement	27.30	32.60	31.80
Teaching	27.50	30.30	31.10
Discipline	24.10	29.80	29.80
Assessment/Time on Task	26.60	31.20	31.80
Leadership	25.40	29.70	29.90
Expectation	28.00	31.40	32.40
Average	25.70	29.80	30.00

Urban N =96, Suburban N =775, Rural N=243

A comparison of the culture/climate data revealed that the three culture variables: group openness, group cooperation, and group atmosphere were the lowest with scores of 24.34, 29.03 and 28.56. Since climate depends on the underlying culture, it becomes more difficult to have good climate scores when the culture needs improvement. The behaviors related to the "discipline" factor, with a score of 29.80, were the lowest in the climate domain. The faculty agreed with scores of 32.0 that the behaviors associated with three climate factors were present. They were parent involvement, expectations, and time on task/assessment. The remaining climate factors: discipline, teaching, leadership, and sense of mission were all below 32.0

A comparison of the data using Pearson correlation to see if their was a relationship between school size and a school's culture and climate resulted in a negative correlation of -.350 for all 25 schools ($p > .05$). As noted earlier, the culture and climate scores of the three urban schools were not as positive as the other 22 schools. Removing their data from the comparison resulted in a negative correlation of -.425 ($p < .05$). The difference is probably a result of the lower culture and climate scores for the urban schools. Because the three urban schools did not appear to be representative of other schools in Georgia, their data were removed from the data in Tables 5 and 6.

In looking at the correlations of the four culture variables (see Table 5 with size, while all are negative, only two are significant ($p < .05$). They are group trust (-.434) and group atmosphere (-.425) Three of the climate variables were also significant ($p < .05$). They are teaching (-.545), assessment/time on task (-.510) and expectation (-.592). While only five of the 11 culture and climate factors are significant, all 11 are negative indicating that as school size increases, culture and climate scores tend to decrease.

Table 5

A comparison of the relationship of school size with the four culture bariables.

	Culture/ Climate	Group trust	Group openness	Group cooperation	Group atmosphere
Group trust	+.754**				
Group openness	+.555**	+.645**			
Group cooperation	+.821**	+.477**	+.325		
Group atmosphere	+.935**	+.730**	+.468*	+.820*	
Size	-.425*	-.434*	-.179	-.112	-.425*

N = 22 ** p<.01, ** p<.05*

The correlations for the 11 culture and climate factors (see Table 6) with each other tend to be very high with expectations and assessment/time on task being the highest (.939) See appendix A to examine the behaviors measured by these two climate factors. Openness and sense of mission are the two factors with the lowest correlations. The low correlations for openness are probably a result of the two dimensions measured by this factor. Openness has a telling and a listening dimension. Faculty can be very open on one dimension and closed on the other and vice versa. For this reason, correlations tend to low for openness with the other factors. Low correlations for sense of mission tend to be caused by the fact that while faculty may have been involved in developing the mission, most faculty cannot tell you what it is because it is not celebrated. Rather it tends to get filed somewhere only to be visited when someone asks about it.

Table 6
A comparison of the relationship of school size with the seven climate variables.

	Culture/ Climate	Sense of mission	Parent involvement	Teaching	Discipline	Assessment/ Time on task	Leadership	Expectation
Sense of mission	+.526**							
Parent involvement	+.873**	+.304						
Teaching	+.882**	+.382	+.815**					
Discipline	+.765**	+.210	+.693**	+.590**				
Assessment/ Time on Task	+.900**	+.406*	+.850**	+.912**	+.617**			
Leadership	+.605**	+.136**	+.382**	+.395	+.508*	+.415*		
Expectation	+.918**	+.446*	+.837**	+.932**	+.605**	+.939**	+.519*	
Size	-.425*	-.268	-.221	-.545**	-.197	-.510**	-.317	-.592**

N = 22, **p<.01, p<.05*

Conclusions

The database from the 25 schools provides norms for schools from different settings. This allows school officials to compare their data against that of other schools. One conclusion based on the data is that most schools do not have a good climate, as only two elementary schools had an average score that was over 32.0 indicating agreement that a good culture and climate was present. Another conclusion is that elementary schools have much better climates than middle and high schools. Whether this is a result of smaller school size or the elementary setting is unknown. It is possible that more well behaved elementary students are responsible for the better climate and not school size. Regarding urban schools, it is likely that they have less positive cultures and climates, but the small number of schools involved in this study do not justify such a conclusion.

Appendix A

A MEASURE OF SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

The measure of school culture has four variables as follows: group openness, group trust, group cooperation, and group atmosphere. The measure of school climate has seven variables as follows: sense of mission, instructional leadership, student discipline, parent involvement, assessment/time on task, teaching practices, and expectations. All underlined items are negative and must be reverse scored.

Definitions of each variable and the items which measure them are as follows:

GROUP TRUST = an interpersonal condition that exists when interpersonal relationships are characterized by an assured reliance or confident dependence on the character, ability, predictability, confidentiality, and truthfulness of others in the group.

Question others' intentions and /or motives.
Conceal your true feelings to what others do and/or say.
Count on others for assistance.
Believe that others care about you.
Deal with them directly when there is a problem.
Know that they will respond favorably in a situation where your welfare is at stake.
Rely on them to keep a confidence.
Believe that they are honest.
Count on them to do what they say they are going to do.
Tell the truth when it needs to be told.
Respect the opinions of your colleagues.
Admit mistakes and/or problems when necessary.
Support their ideas, decisions, and actions.
Believe that they will behave consistently regardless of the person, situation, or level of stress.

GROUP OPENNESS =an interpersonal condition that exists between people when: (1) facts, ideas, values, beliefs, and feelings are shared; and (2) the other person(s) is/are willing to listen.

Tell others what you think of the way they do things.
Tell others what you think of their ideas, values, and/or beliefs.
Express your feelings.
Ask others what they think about the way you do things.
Ask others what they think about your ideas, values, and/or beliefs.
Ask others about their feelings.
Accept others comments and reactions.
Disagree with others if you don't agree with what is being said or done.

Share positive thoughts with others instead of keeping them to yourself.
Share constructive criticism with others instead of keeping it to yourself.

GROUP COOPERATION = an interpersonal condition that exists between the various constituents (teachers, staff, students, parents, and community) in the school setting.

Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.
A school leadership team or advisory council assists the administration with decisions.
A student leadership team or advisory council assists the administration with decisions.
A parent leadership team or advisory council assists the administration with decisions.
The administration of this school keeps the constituents in the school setting adequately informed.
The constituents in the school setting are encouraged to communicate with the administration.
The degree of cooperation between the faculty and the administration is appropriate.
The degree of cooperation between the faculty and the staff is appropriate.

GROUP ATMOSPHERE = a supportive interpersonal condition that exists between the constituents (teachers, staff, students, parents, and community) in the school setting.

The feeling that people care about each other is present in the school.
The physical condition of the school facility is acceptable.
People at this school complain a lot.
Faculty and staff morale at this school is low.
Teachers are sensitive and responsive to the needs of students.
The administration is sensitive and responsive to the needs of teachers.
The administration shows favoritism to some constituents.
There is a feeling of togetherness/community at this school.

SENSE OF MISSION =the degree to which the faculty agrees on a philosophy of education and is committed to the school's goals and objectives.

The school's mission is posted for everyone to see.
A short phrase that captures the school's mission has been developed and placed in conspicuous places, e.g., on stationery, buses, etc.
The administration creates opportunities for the mission/vision to be shared with constituents.
The faculty was involved in creating the mission.
A mission statement has been created, but it is not seen or shared.
The faculty is in agreement as to the mission of the school.
The mission statement is of little value for what happens at our school.
If asked, the faculty are able to describe the school's mission statement.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT = the administration has created an environment that encourages parents to be involved

Parents are recruited to serve as volunteers at the school.
The administration supports some form of media (newsletter, computer, etc.) to communicate with constituents on a regular basis.
The relationship that exists between parents and the teachers is a good one.
The relationship that exists between parents and the administration is a good one.
It is easy for parents to find out how their child(ren) is/are doing academically.
It is easy for parents to find out what their child(ren) must do for homework.
The administration has recruited business/community partners.
Volunteers who participate at the school are recognized for their efforts.

TEACHING = the degree to which teachers use appropriate instructional strategies to promote student achievement.

Teachers vary instructional strategies according to the needs of the students.
The behavior of the teachers communicates that they care about their students.
Homework assignments are appropriate for the student and subject.
Teachers explain the objective(s) of the activity or lesson for the day.
Teachers at this school are unable to control students in their classroom.
Teachers motivate the students to want to learn.
Teachers review previous work before introducing new material.
Teachers help students to feel good about themselves.

DISCIPLINE =the degree to which the administration and teachers are able to control the behavior of the students

The atmosphere in the classroom is conducive to learning.
The procedure the administration has in place for office referrals and discipline is effective.
The degree of communication with teachers about an office referral is appropriate.
Students' safety is a problem at this school.
The administration supports teachers in matters related to student discipline.
The responsibility for student behavior is shared by staff/faculty members.
Communication with parents about student misbehavior is appropriate.
The administrative plan for dealing with student absences and tardies is appropriate.

ASSESSMENT/TIME ON TASK =what the teachers and administration do to monitor student achievement and time on task.

Student achievement data are monitored by the administration.
Student achievement data are used to provide feedback to teachers.
Student achievement data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of a program or change in the curriculum.
Teachers' grading practices are based on a variety of activities that monitor student learning.
Classroom instruction starts and ends on time.
The administration does their best to minimize time lost due to pull out programs and/or extra-curricular activities.
The administration does their best to minimize time lost due to classroom interruptions.
Teachers' classroom management practices are effective in keeping students on task.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP = what the administration does to improve student achievement.

The amount and type of feedback the administration gives teachers are appropriate.
The administration makes sure that teachers have adequate materials and supplies.
The principal spends too much time in the office.
The administration uses staff development plans to promote student achievement.
The administration provides opportunities for teachers to grow professionally.
The administration empowers the faculty and staff.
The principal organizes and plans so that things run smoothly.
The administration knows what is happening in the classroom.

EXPECTATIONS =Those teacher and administrator behaviors that tell students what is expected.

Teachers make an effort to motivate those students who have low interest in schoolwork.
Teachers believe that every student can learn and can improve.
The administration has high expectations for teacher performance.
The teachers have high expectations for student performance.
Students are given opportunities to show that they are responsible.
Teachers stress continuity of learning and make connections between subject matter taught.
Teachers place more emphasis on regurgitation of facts than they do on application.
The use of workbooks, worksheets, and other fill in the blank type materials is excessive.

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